

Windler Farm
Vicinity of East 48th Avenue and
Picadilly Road
Aurora
Adams County
Colorado

HABS No. CO-84

HABS
COLO,
1-AUR,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

Windler Farm
HABS No. CO-84
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WINDLER FARM

ADAMS COUNTY, COLORADO

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Farm buildings are located in the northeast quarter of Section 24, Township 3 South, Range 66 West, 6th Principal Meridian. Lands include the west half of Section 18 and the northwest quarter of Section 19, Township 3 South, Range 65 West, together with the southeast quarter of Section 13 and the northwest quarter of Section 24, Township 3 South, Range 66 West, 6th Principal Meridian. The site is located one-half mile east of Picadilly Road, and one-third mile south of East Forty-eighth Avenue in rural Adams County, Colorado.

Present Owner: Karl and Ardyce Windler, 14183 E. Layton Drive, Aurora, CO 80015

Present Use: Farm buildings are used for storage of farm supplies and equipment. Land is used for growing wheat and raising cattle.

Significance: The Windler farm is one of the earliest surviving family-owned farms in Adams County, Colorado and is representative of a rapidly disappearing agricultural lifestyle on Colorado's eastern plains.

Historians: R. Laurie Simmons and Christine Whitacre, Front Range Research Associates, Inc., September 1988

II. HISTORY

Henry Windler, Sr., was born in Hanover, Germany in 1831. His wife, Anna Catharina Dreyer Windler was also born in Germany, in 1847. The Windlers, who were farmers in their native land, emigrated to the United States with their children in 1882. By the 1880s, German immigrants formed the largest ethnic group in Denver and a large number of Germans had established themselves on Colorado's eastern plains. Upon first arriving in Colorado, the family stayed with Herman and Catherine Dreyer, relatives of Anna Windler, who had a dairy farm on Sand Creek. The Dreyers were among the first German immigrants to the area, and they assisted many of their relatives in coming to Colorado. Before long, the Windlers were ready to obtain their own farm.¹

Henry Windler's first purchase of land was made on 28 February 1883. He bought eighty acres from Detlef Moller, who had received patent to the west half of the northeast quarter of Section 24, Township 3 South, Range 66 West in January of the same year. Windler paid twenty-five dollars an acre for the parcel, which included grazing lands a short distance from the generally dry drainage of First Creek, approximately two miles north of the line of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, which had entered Denver in 1870. The choice of this site, which was not irrigated, reflected the common practice of the foreign-born farmer to buy cheaper, non-irrigated land rather than the more expensive acreages with water which had been established earlier. For his expenditure, Windler also obtained the improvements made by Moller, which probably included a house, farm buildings, and fences.²

On the same day, Windler filed an application for a timber culture claim on the southwest quarter section of Section 18, Township 3 South, Range 65 West, diagonally northeast of his

¹Colorado, Census Bureau, First Census of the State of Colorado, 1885, "Arapahoe County"; National Archives and Records Administration, Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49, Denver Land Office, Cash Entry Case File No. 15937; Rocky Mountain News, 21 June 1962, p. 101; interview with Karl and Ardyce Windler, owners of Windler Farm, Aurora, Colorado, 24 October 1988; interview with Morris Wager, Peer Farm, Adams County, Colorado, 21 August 1988; and Carl Dorr, History of Adams County, Brighton, and Fort Lupton, (Brighton, Colo.: Brighton Publishing Co., 1955).

²Warranty Deed, "Detlef Moller to Henry Windler," 28 February 1883; U. S., Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, "Master Title Plat for Township 3 South, Range 66 West, 6th Principal Meridian"; Rodman Paul, The Far West and the Great Plains In Transition, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 122; and Stephen J. Leonard, "The Irish, English and Germans in Denver: 1860-1890," Colorado Magazine 54(Spring 1977): 143.

purchase. In order to file for this land, Windler had to declare his intention to become a naturalized citizen. He formally became a citizen of the United States on 15 October 1888.

Under the stipulations of the Timber Culture Act of 1878, a farmer was required to put ten acres of land in trees to obtain 160 acres. The land involved had to be non-mineral land and could have no trees growing on it at the time of entry. The claimant was required to plant at least 2,700 trees per acre, and at time of proof to have at least 675 living and healthy trees on each acre. A temporary increase in rainfall starting in 1878 led land promoters and railroads to lure hundreds to the eastern plains in the 1880s with glowing reports of agricultural potential. Beginning in the late 1880s, however, a series of severe droughts struck the region. This turn of events is reflected in Windler's problems with his timber claim.³

Complying with the terms of the law, Windler broke twenty acres of land during the first, second, and third years of his occupation, and he cultivated twenty acres in the second and third years. In the third year, 1886, he planted ten acres of maple, elm, ash, and catalpa seedlings. Most of these trees succumbed to the unusually harsh drought, so he was forced, in 1887, to replace many of the trees. During the fourth year, Windler planted different varieties of seedlings. Ten acres of box elder, honey, and black locust seedlings were established. Again, his trees failed to thrive and he was unable to keep enough trees in the healthy condition required for obtaining patent. By the time of his final application in 1891, he had planted not less than eight thousand trees on each acre, and yet he had a total of only 1,100 trees growing on ten acres.⁴

Although he received an extension on the period of time necessary to prove up his claim due to the destruction of his trees, he was eventually forced to give up the effort. In 1891, Windler testified, "I have endeavored to keep ten acres in such condition (healthy) but have failed from lack of water." Finally, he was forced to convert his claim to a cash entry and paid \$1.25 per acre for the land.⁵

On 8 September 1883, Windler filed an application for a homestead entry. This time, he sought to obtain the eighty acres east of his previously acquired land in Section 24, Township 3 South, Range 66 West. The land had earlier been occupied by Charles H. Miller, who sold a relinquishment to Windler. Although the government did not recognize the selling of relinquishments as

³Cash Entry Case File No. 15937; and Henry N. Copp, ed., Public Land Laws (Washington, D.C.: Henry N. Copp, 1890).

⁴Rodman Paul, The Far West, pp. 231-233; and Cash Entry Case File No. 15937.

⁵Cash Entry Case File No. 15937.

giving legal title to the land, it was a fairly common practice to buy one in hopes of obtaining non-conflicted entry into previously claimed acreage.

Windler testified that he settled on the land in 1883, but did not reside there until 5 March 1888. He stated that on 15 July 1883, he and hired men built a house on the claim, but he was unable to move in until five years later. The homesteader gave poverty as the reason for his failure to establish residence on the land. Apparently, Windler lived in a residence which had been built on the land he had purchased in February 1883, and could not move his family to the homestead until his financial condition improved. This failure to comply with the terms of the Homestead Act, which required residence within six months of entry, would result in complications when Windler sought to prove up.⁶

The acreage comprising the homestead claim was similar to that of his other acquisitions, being sandy loam of good quality and suitable for grazing. Windler stated that on 15 November 1883 he started a fence on this land. In 1885, he planted five acres of corn, but this crop was destroyed by cattle and no other cultivation was attempted.⁷

His experience with tree growing no doubt convinced Windler that, without water, the land would not raise most crops. When the family first came to the United States, they had stayed on a successful dairy farm and it was probably their plan, upon acquiring their own land, to begin a dairy and poultry farm. In 1885, the state census lists residents of the farm as Windler, his wife, and children, Anna, Katie, Henry, Jr., and William. Farm animals consisted of three horses, seventeen milk cows, twelve calves, three swine, and 230 chickens. Like most of the farmers in the area, Windler sold milk to the Denver market, and in 1884, his cows produced ten thousand gallons. In addition, during the same year, the family made 2,500 pounds of butter to be traded on the market and the chickens produced nine hundred dozen eggs.⁸

This was the common pattern for the successful farmer in the vicinity. The land was not as suitable for the wide variety of crops as promised by land promoters, and most of the local farmers who stayed on their claims and survived the droughts of the 1880s turned to dairy production. Anna Catharina Windler and the children did much of the farm work, milking the cows,

⁶National Archives and Records Administration, Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Record Group No. 49, Denver Land Office, Cash Entry Case File No. 12413.

⁷Ibid.; and Colorado Census Bureau, First Census, "Productions of Agriculture in the County of Arapahoe."

⁸Ibid.

collecting eggs, churning butter, and raising a small vegetable garden, pigs, and veal calves for home consumption. Henry Windler, as was the custom in the area, delivered milk, butter, and eggs to a particular part of Denver on a weekly basis. A full day was required to service the route. The Windler route was centered around a grocery store which bought much of the butter and eggs. These products were sometimes traded to the store for other items unavailable on the farm. The selling of these commodities produced the cash income needed by the Windlers to expand their holdings and buy necessary equipment.⁹

At the time of Windler's final proof for his homestead entry in 1891, the family was living on the claim and had constructed a frame house with a tin roof and board and batten siding and an addition with a wood shingle roof. The house had two rooms, common board floors, two doors (one paneled, one plain), and four, four light windows. The furniture in the home included two cast iron stoves, two bedsteads, two tables, six chairs, one bench, one trunk, one cupboard, and one looking glass. In addition, the farm included a well forty-eight feet deep and four feet square, an iron pump, a windmill twenty feet high with a frame tower, a cellar seven feet deep, and fences. Windler's farm implements included one mower, one hay rake, one plow, two wagons, and other tools. The family also owned the house on their purchased land and probably had other buildings there as well.¹⁰

The failure of the family to take up residence on the homestead claim until 1888 meant that, legally, Windler would have to wait until five years from that date to obtain title unless he commuted the entry to cash. Apparently, Windler first attempted to obtain the homestead patent, but was rejected in this effort due to his failure to fulfill residency requirements. He had filed his intent to make final proof of his homestead claim in October 1888 and appeared before the receiver on 9 January 1889 in Denver. Rather than wait until 1893 to receive title to the land, his homestead entry was converted to a cash entry on the following day, 10 January 1889, when he paid \$2.50 per acre for the land.¹¹

The remaining portion of the Windlers' lands were purchased from private sources. The northwest quarter of Section 19, Township 3 South, Range 65 West and the southeast quarter of Section 13, Township 3 South, Range 66 West were originally part of a railroad grant to the Kansas Pacific Railroad, which Windler

⁹Interview with Karl Windler, Windler Homestead, Adams County, Colorado, 29 June 1988; interview with Morris Wager, 21 August 1988; and interview with Karl and Ardyce Windler, 24 October 1988.

¹⁰Cash Entry Case File No. 12413.

¹¹Ibid.; and Copp, pp. 441-442.

purchased by 1899. The railroads were granted these lands as a means of funding their construction costs. They made these acreages available to farmers at attractive rates and set up payment schedules for the purchaser.¹²

The northwest quarter of Section 18, Township 3 South, Range 65 West, Windler purchased from Elmer E. Merritt and William C. Turner in 1902. The east half of this section had originally been homesteaded by La Fayette W. Bacon, a farmer from Pueblo, Colorado in 1887. Bacon received final patent in 1894 and apparently sold the land to speculators Merritt and Turner, who were lightning rod salesmen by profession. This was the last addition to the Windler farm and brought the total acreage to eight hundred acres.¹³

Adding value to the Windler property was the construction of a new railway, completed in 1886. The Colorado Eastern Railroad extended from Denver to coal fields east of the Windler homestead. The seventeen mile railroad began at Denver's Omaha and Grant Smelter. East of Sand Creek, the railroad traveled north and then east until it came within a mile and a third north of the site of the Windler farm. At that point, the railroad curved southeast to its final destination, the Scranton Coal Mine. The railroad would occasionally make unscheduled stops at the trail leading to the Windler home, providing the residents with convenient transportation to and from the city. Unfortunately, the coal from the Scranton fields proved to be of poor quality, and in 1915, the Colorado Eastern ceased operation. Remnants of the railroad were used in the construction of Windler feed bunks in a corral.¹⁴

In 1910, Windler expanded beyond his original location and purchased an eighty acre irrigated farm northeast of Brighton. While he had been successful at adapting to the non-irrigated land where he lived, his purchase of an irrigated farm where a variety of crops could be grown indicates increased prosperity. As the eldest Windler son, Henry, Jr., was to inherit the

¹²U.S., Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, "Master Title Plat for Township 3 South, Range 65 West"; and Alfred Windler, "Windler Family," in The History of Brighton, Colorado and Surrounding Area, (Dallas: Curtis Media Corp., 1987), p. 674.

¹³"Warranty Deed," Elmer E. Merritt, et al to Henry Windler, Sr., 3 January 1902; National Archives and Records Administration, Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Record Group No. 49, Denver Land Office, Homestead Entry Case File No. 3651; and Denver City Directory, 1901.

¹⁴John C. Newell and P.R. Griswold, Narrow Gauge East From Denver, The Colorado Eastern Railroad (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 10-12, 35-36, 38-39, and 61; and interview with Karl Windler, 29 June 1988.

original farm, and Windler, Sr. wanted his younger sons, William and August, to have a farm to inherit, too.¹⁵

Two years later, Windler died and Henry, Jr., took over the original farm. As a condition of his inheritance, Henry, Jr., reimbursed his two sisters for their shares in the farm, thereby insuring that the women were not excluded in the inheritance process. Henry, Jr., was born in Germany in 1879. He attended the local one room school house at First Creek after his family moved to the Colorado farm. In 1910, he married Bertha Peer, the daughter of a dairyman. The Peers owned a sizable dairy farm near the Windler property. Because their families were of different religions, Henry, Jr., and Bertha Peer did not live together until many years later, but maintained their own farms and assisted one another after their parents' deaths.¹⁶

Henry Windler, Jr., continued the farm operations which his parents had established, selling milk, butter, and eggs on the family route. He also raised a sizable number of hogs. Windler, Jr., was an active member of the local Grange until his death. The agricultural economy of the area began to change when larger dairies in the region initiated the practice of buying milk from the smaller ones, thereby eliminating individual milk routes. Windler then milked the cows and kept the milk in cooling tanks in the milk house until a milk wagon came for it.¹⁷

In the 1920s, a last attempt at acquiring water for the land was made. Local farmers dug an extension to the High Line Canal using horses, mules, and scrapers. This canal, which ran through the homestead north and east of the farm buildings, never had access to enough water to make it a feasible operation. The outlines of the abandoned canal can be still be seen today. During the 1930s, the lack of water was exacerbated by the dust storms which plagued the eastern plains.¹⁸

Eventually, the dairy economy in the region dwindled. New regulations required that machines milk the cows, and most of the local farmers could not afford, or did not want, to convert to this type of production. Gradually, beef cattle were introduced and farmers also began growing substantial acreages of dryland wheat successfully. After Henry, Jr., suffered a stroke, he went

¹⁵ Interview with Karl Windler, 29 June 1988; interview with Morris Wager, 21 August 1988; and Alfred Windler, "Windler Family."

¹⁶ Rocky Mountain News, 21 June 1962, p. 101; Denver Post, 21 June 1962, P. 58; and William Windler, "Windler, Karl and Ardyce," in Brighton, Colorado and Surrounding Area (Dallas: Curtis Media Group, 1987), p. 676.

¹⁷ Ibid; interview with Karl Windler, 29 June 1988; and interview with Morris Wager, 21 August 1988.

¹⁸ Interview with Karl Windler, 29 June 1988.

to live with his wife, Bertha Peer, on her farm and his nephew, Karl Windler, began taking care of the Windler operations. Later, the land was leased to other farmers. With Henry Windler, Jr.'s death in 1962, his wife became the owner of the farm. When she died in 1970, Karl and Ardyce Windler inherited the land. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-11) Karl Windler had been operating the farm near Brighton purchased by Henry Windler, Sr., in 1910. In 1984, the Karl Windlers moved their operations to the first Windler farm. Today, they continue to raise cattle and lease the land for wheat production.¹⁹

¹⁹Interview with Morris Wager, 21 August 1988; Rocky Mountain News, 21 June 1962, p. 101; Denver Post, 11 November 1970, p. 51; Colorado Historical Society; Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, "Colorado Centennial Farm Application," 12 May 1986; interview with Karl and Ardyce Windler, 29 June 1988.

III. FARM BUILDINGS

The Windler farmhouse is a one-and-a-half story brick building attached to a one-and-a-half story frame building. (See HABS photo nos. CO-84-A-1 through CO-84-A-6) The brick portion of the house, constructed in 1894, has double brick walls and a front-gabled roof with decorative wood shingles in the gable end. The front and rear upper gable ends have a four-over-four light windows. The building features its original paneled and glazed front door, which has small stained glass lights and a transom. The small entry porch to the brick house has a shed roof, post supports, pierced wooden brackets, and a wooden balustrade. The first floor of the brick building has three windows on the southern elevation, one on the rear, and two on the northern elevation. Each window is double-hung with two-over-two lights, segmental arches, and wooden sills. Some of the windows have been boarded up to prevent vandalism. The rear gable end also has an outside entry door, which is paneled and has a transom. The roof is covered with wooden shingles. The house has two brick chimneys, one in the center and one on the front inside end. Small, segmental arched windows are located near the foundation on the northern and southern elevations to provide ventilation under the house.

The interior of the brick portion of the house is composed of four rooms on the first floor and two on the second. The interior has retained much of its original detail. The first floor contains a large living/dining room, with wooden wainscoting, molded window and door trim, and hardwood floors, a parlor with exterior door, and two bedrooms. The upper floor has two bedrooms. Walls are plastered, and some have original wallpaper.

The frame portion of the house was probably constructed before the brick, and is likely to date to the homesteading era of the 1880s. Although the building now has shiplap siding, historic photographs indicate that it was originally covered with board and batten siding. Its design is similar in description to the homestead house built by Windler in 1893. The building may be the original two room house built by Windler and moved to this site, or it may be one constructed by the earlier homesteader on the land, Detlef Moller. The walls of this portion of the house are insulated with sod. The building is comprised of a front-gabled section, with a shed-roofed addition on the northern elevation. The front-gabled portion has a full-width, open, shed porch with post supports and shiplap-sided porch walls. The center front entrance is flanked on the left by a double-hung window with plain wooden surround. A small, square window is in the front gable end. The shed addition has a four-over-four light, double-hung window on the facade, and a square, four-pane window on the northern elevation. The interior is divided into a kitchen, a wash room, and a pantry. The kitchen features an

enamel cook stove and the oriental rug which originally lay in the living room. The foundation of the frame portion of the house is concrete, as is that of the brick portion.

Brick farmhouses with such elaborate architectural details are atypical for this portion of Adams County. However, the Dreyer dairy, where the Windlers stayed when they first arrived in Colorado, also had a brick house attached to a frame house. Historic photographs indicate that the Dreyer house was also a one-and-a-half story, front gabled building. Perhaps the style of the Dreyer farmhouse influenced the Windlers when they acquired enough money to build their permanent residence. The insulation in the walls of the frame structure reflects local practice. At least one other nearby farm, the Gyra/Burkhardt farm, has similar insulation. Often, sod was the original wall cladding, which was later covered with other materials as a family became more prosperous. The sod was a valued insulating material which kept out extremes of temperature. Many families kept their original sod buildings as kitchen additions.²⁰

The barn, which dates from the homestead era, is a large, cross-gabled building with vertical board siding, and a metal roof with cupolas. As was common, one wing of the barn was used for dairy cows, the other for horses. On the western elevation of the building are small, horizontal windows, which provide ventilation and light to the individual animal stalls. The cupola also provided fresh air. The barn has a concrete floor. Corrals are adjacent to the barn. There are two concrete stave silos which replace the original wooden silo, which was torn down and utilized in construction of a chicken house. The silos are approximately fifty years old. (See HABS photo nos. CO-84-2 to CO-84-4.)

The chicken house/tool shed is a one-and-a-half story frame building, constructed of wood salvaged from the farm's original wooden silo. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-7). The building's southern elevation has a ribbon of windows on the first floor, each with nine panes of glass. Originally, a band of windows also ran horizontally along the upper wall of the southern elevation. These windows have been covered. A long, narrow storage shed extends from the building's eastern elevation. The building dates to the 1930s.

The shed-roofed outhouse was constructed by the Works Projects Administration and brought to the farm during the 1930s. The building has horizontal wood siding and a vertical board door. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-9.)

²⁰For a discussion of this practice, see Clara H. Ehrlich, *My Prairie Childhood*, ed. Sidney Heitman, (Ft. Collins, Colo.: Colorado State University, 1977), p. 6.

The farm complex includes several small, functional outbuildings. The grain shed has board and batten siding, a vertical board door, and a wood shingle roof. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-6.) The building, which has no foundation, has a wooden floor. The hog shed, located to the south of the grain shed, is constructed of corrugated metal and has a shed roof.

One of the more significant smaller buildings is the milk house. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-5.) The front-gabled building, which dates to the late 1800s, has board and batten and horizontal wood siding. The building is located next to the windmill and well and water was pumped into the milk house to cool and regulate the temperature of the milk. A second brick-lined ground well, now abandoned, is located behind the milk house. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-10.) Also on the property are a tool shed and a storage shed. These two buildings, which are located southwest of the farmhouse, have gabled rooflines and are constructed of vertical boards. (See HABS photo no. CO-84-8.)

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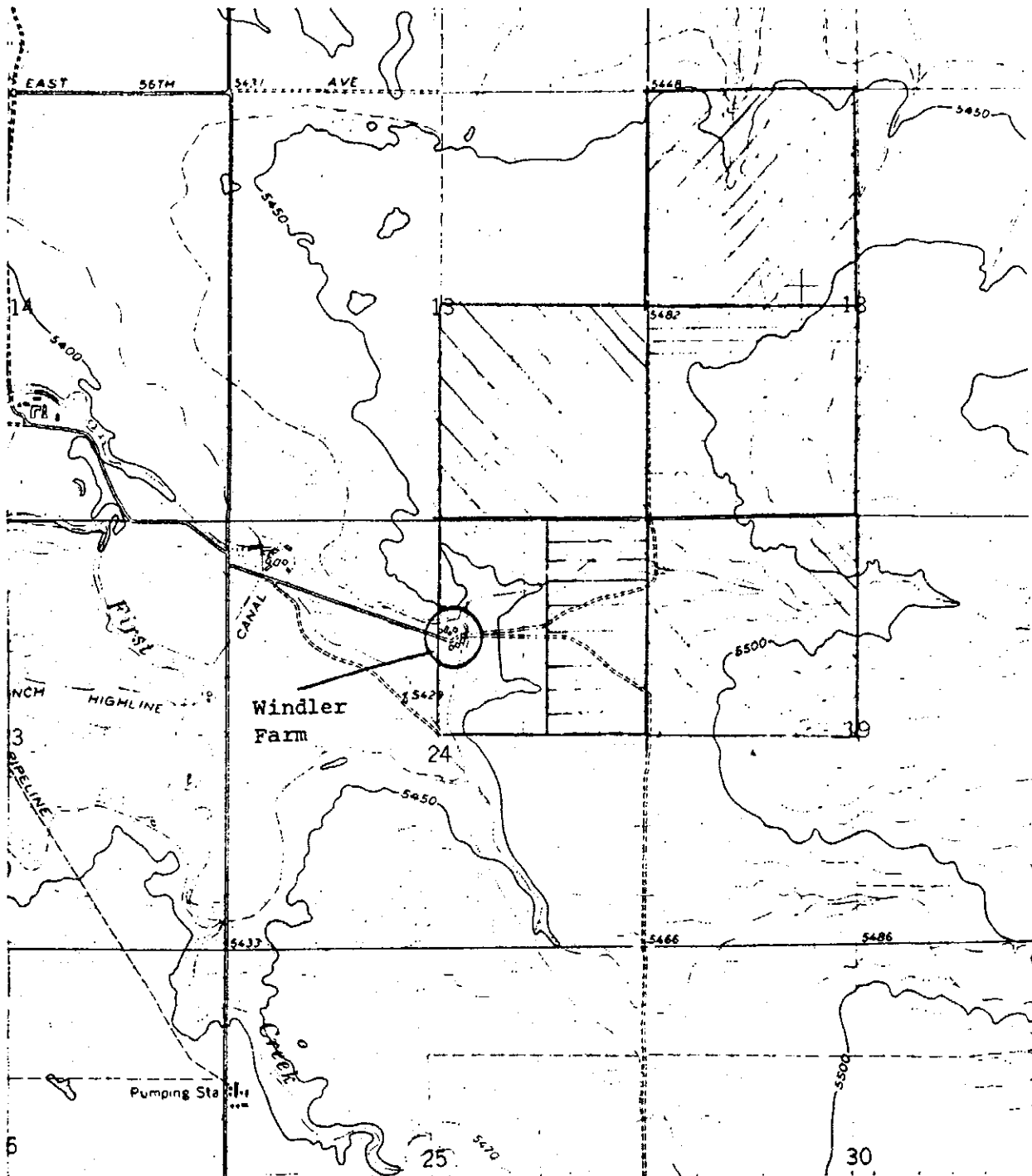
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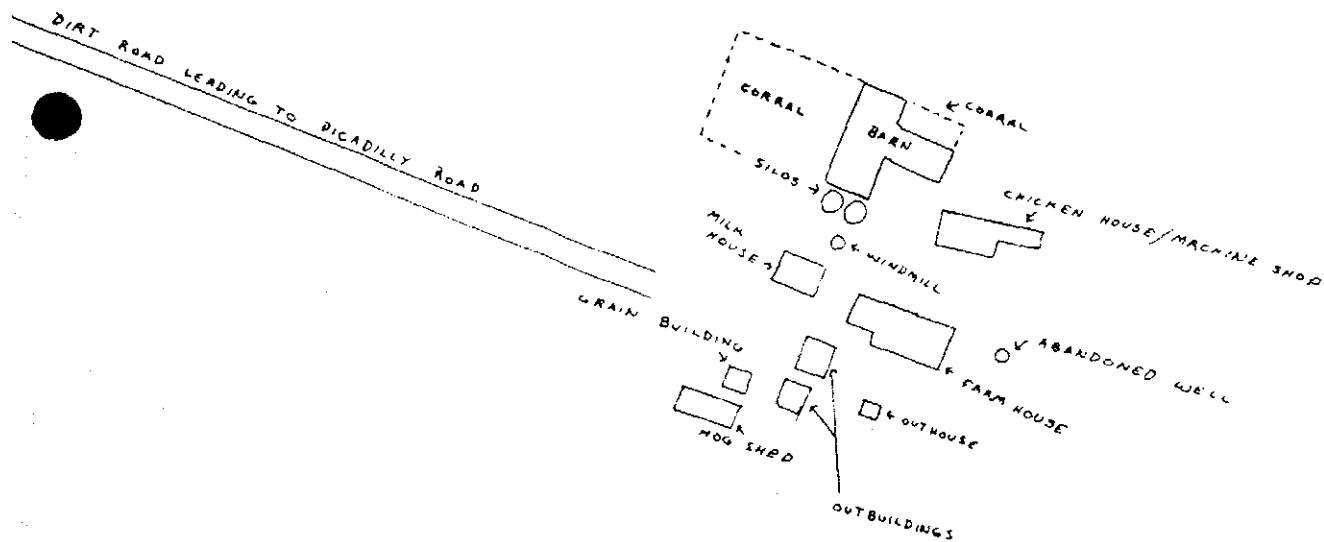
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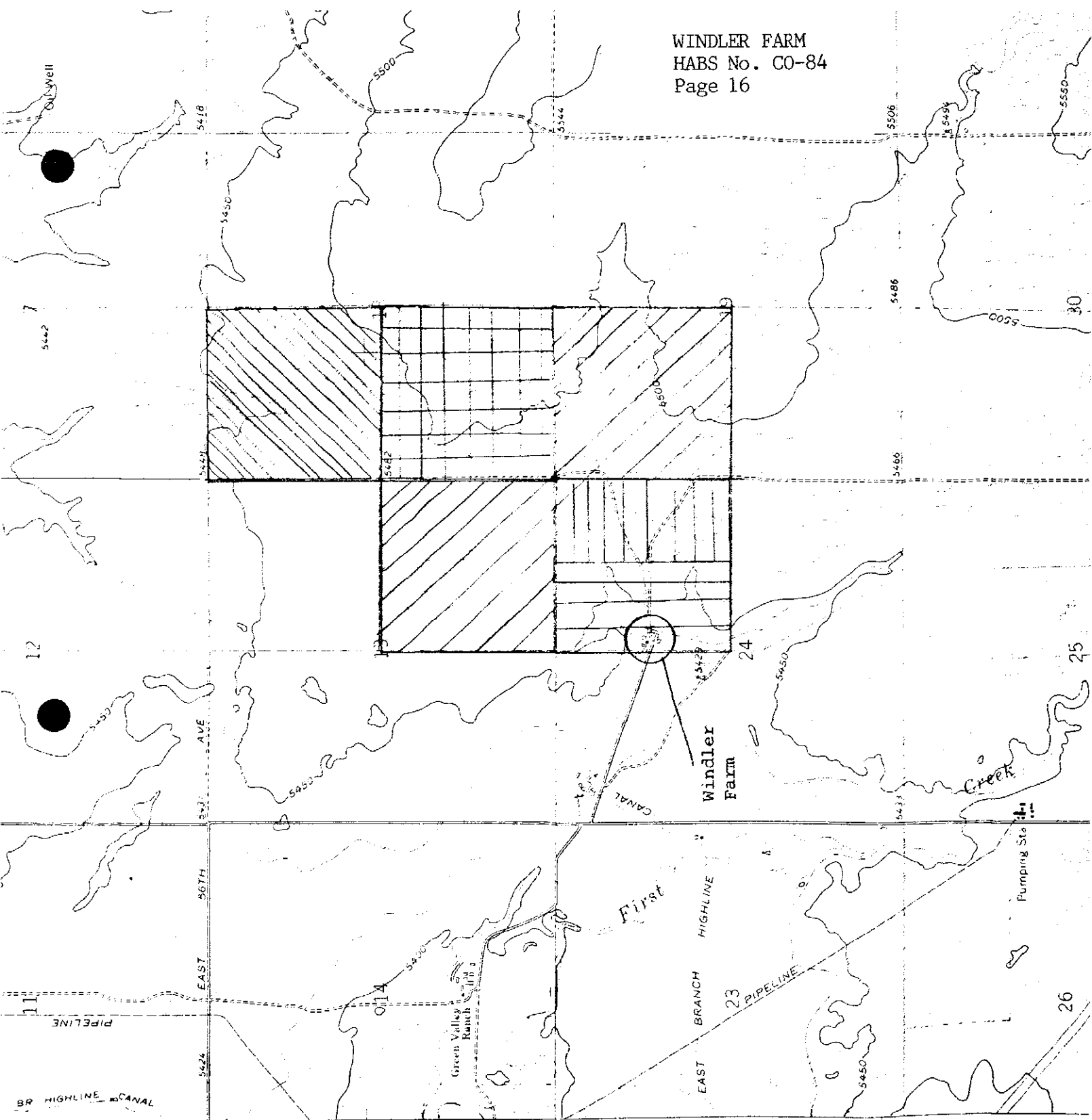
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Sketch Map Showing Locations of Farm Buildings



PASTURE LAND





ACQUISITIONS OF LAND
BY HENRY WINDLER, SR.

- ||||| Purchased, 1883
- ==== Cash Entry, 1891
- ==== Cash Entry, 1892
- ||||| Purchased by 1899
- ||||| purchased, 1902

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